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BISHOPS CONSIDER WORLD AND NATIONAL PROBLEMS

CHATTANOOGA -- Matters of world and national security and domestic violence occupied the attention of the bishops of the Episcopal Church at their 1980 interim meeting Oct. 2-9 at the Read House here.

In an informal setting and a mood of unity and amicability, the 164 bishops strove for a balance of prayer and meditation and concern for the problems of the world. The former was presented through a series of morning meditations by Belgian Cardinal Leo Suenens on the Holy Spirit and song-filled worship led by Dean and Mrs. David Collins of Atlanta and daily eucharists at near-by St. Paul's Church at which Dean Alan Webster of London's St. Paul's Cathedral preached on the future of the Church in the '80s.

The latter was achieved through a series of resolutions on lifestyle, armaments studies, draft registration, foreign policy and through a firmly-worded pastoral letter on the responsibility of a Christian in the voting process.

In comments after, many of the bishops said that this had been one of the best meetings of the House they had every attended and some veterans characterized it as "the best meeting in 15 years."

Presiding Bishop John M. Allin was one of those most pleased with the meeting, commenting: "The spirit of this meeting was excellent. I believe the bishops were both challenged and refreshed by what transpired during our time together." He explained that "the aim of the agenda committee for this meeting was to have the bishops deal with a number of important issues in a substantial manner and I do believe this is, indeed, what happened."

That sense of unity and purpose was demonstrated early when Bishop Edmond Browning of Hawaii asked that the traditional pastoral letter deal "at least in part" with the emergence of Christian sects as political power blocs. The House then asked its Pastoral Letter committee -- chaired by Bishop Bennett Sims of Atlanta -- to develop an explanation of an Anglican position on Christian voting responsibility.

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The proposal drew support from a wide spectrum of bishops, many of whom echoed the suffragan bishop of Dallas, Robert Terwilliger, who said he hoped the House could speak clearly on "this false, rightist and biblicist movement." In departure from usual procedure, the bishops agreed to carry the letter home and speed it to their clergy so that it could be read from all Churches before the election. (See DPS #80353.)

In other matters, the House agreed to the pleas of Bishop Otis Charles of Utah and Wesley Frensdorff of Nevada and urged a churchwide study "of the MX system, the ability of the system to achieve its purpose of protection and peace and its potential effect on the people and environment of Nevada, Utah and the nation."

The two bishops -- who have been active foes of the proposed system -- pointed out that very little was known about it except in their immediate area and that this lack of knowledge was allowing the government to proceed with a questionably valuable and expensive system without proper debate.

The resolution also asked that each diocese or church group make known the conclusions of its studies to congressional, executive and military authorities.

Bishop Charles also sponsored a more general resolution calling on the House to agree to a major exploration of arms issues at its next (1981) interim meeting. The House agreed to this and directed its agenda committee to prepare such a report. Bishop William Frey of Colorado pointed out that the General Convention's Joint Commission on Peace would have its own studies well underway by then and would welcome an opportunity to present their preliminary findings to the House.

A resolution presented by Bishop Paul Moore of New York calling for a redirection of U.S. foreign policy away from arms and military security toward human resources aid was referred back to the National and International Problems committee.

The resolution, he explained, was an attempt to ask the country to begin to base national security on the support of nations "who can look upon the U.S. as one who is trying to help them" rather than on what he called "moral bankruptcy" which he saw in foreign policy decisions in the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

The resolution seemed to receive a generally favorable response but was referred -- at the request of Bishop Arthur Walmsley, Coadjutor of Connecticut -- to include language focused on the impact of arms brokerage, a trade which retired Bishop Stanley Atkins of Eau Claire called "the most shameful since the slave trade."

When the resolution was represented it urged a redirection of foreign policy "so as to seek our national security by developing, with emerging nations, economic relations which are mutually beneficial and not exploitative; granting them aid instead of arms; and supporting the world wide struggle for human rights." That carried without audible opposition and will be sent to executive, military and congressional authorities.

A different kind of violence impinged on the meeting when the bishops learned that uniformed Ku Klux Klansmen were allegedly harrassing Chattanooga school children. At the request of Suffragan Bishop Quintin Primo of Chicago, the House quickly resolved to condemn "the terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan as a moral outrage, totally contrary to God's laws and the teachings of Jesus Christ, as well as an affront to all civilized persons."

The resolution also asked for federal and state investigations of domestic terrorism and called on churches to witness against the resurgence.

Among other actions taken during the six days of discussion the House:

- Elected, by acclamation, the Rt. Rev. James Montgomery, Bishop of Chicago, as vice president.
- Agreed to "commit themselves and commend to all other members of the Church" efforts to be more responsible stewards of the "Resources of Creation."
- Reminded the Church of the General Convention opposition to "peacetime conscription or any form of compulsory national service" in the absence of a congressionally-declared emergency and asked the government to halt registration and develop alternative means of service while encouraging the Church Center staff in its development of counseling resources.
- Declared housing problems to be "among our nation's foremost social problems and a pastoral imperative for the Church" and commended the work of the Executive Council Housing Organizing subcommittee and encouraged diocesan and local housing projects.
- Commended the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief and Florida and California dioceses for refugee ministries and encouraged the Church to expand its sponsorship ministry.
- Asked its agenda committee to explore the possibility of only one interim meeting in the 1983-85 triennium as an economy measure.
- Asked the General Convention Manager's office to explore sites for the 1981 interim meeting.
- Sent greetings to former Presiding Bishop and Mrs. John E. Hines on the occasion of their mutual birthdays.

- Sent greetings to the St. Andrew's Seminary in the Philippines on its 25th anniversary.
- Sent greetings to the pilgrims, the Taize Community, the Sojourners and the Bishop of Washington on the occasion of the student pilgrimage.

- Accepted the resignations for purpose of retirement of four bishops who will step down as diocesan bishops in 1981: The Rt. Rev. George M. Murray of Central Gulf Coast; the Rt. Rev. Christoph Keller of Arkansas; the Rt. Rev. Morgan Porteus of Connecticut and the Rt. Rev. Edward C. Turner of Kansas.

- Heard that intercommunion with the Polish National Catholic Church may resume in some cases.

- Heard reports of ecumenical activities including talks with Orthodox, Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches and activities of the World Council and National Council of Churches.

- Heard a report on the theology of the episcopate based on a multi-year survey of the attitudes of bishops and diocesan councils.

- Heard resigned Bishop Robert L. DeWitt condemn media activities of the Society for the Preservation of the Book of Common Prayer for obtaining a televised interview with him under false pretences and using it out of context.

- Learned that the Episcopal Urban Caucus will hold a second nationwide meeting in Louisville, Ky., Feb. 4-7, 1981.

- Heard Church Center Stewardship executive, the Rev. Thomas Carson, encourage urban dioceses to develop plans and programs to utilize Venture in Mission gifts designated for urban needs and urge wider support of the overseas Venture projects.

- Learned from the Bishop of Louisiana, the Rt. Rev. James B. Brown, that two priests -- the Rev. Leo Frade and the Rev. Joe Doss -- from that diocese are facing federal trial for illegally bringing in Cuban refugees and heard him ask for contributions to their defense fund.

- Welcomed 19 bishops who have been consecrated since the House last met.

- Offered thanksgiving for the life and ministry of 10 bishops who have died since the House last met.

- Referred to the Standing Liturgical Commission a resolution calling for abolition of sexist language in liturgy.

- Referred to the Anglican/Roman Catholic Dialogue matters dealing with the acceptance of former Episcopalians into Roman Catholicism.

- Asked the Council for the Development of Ministry and concerned dioceses to monitor carefully programs of lay administration of communion.

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